Symphyotrichum ericoides (Asteraceae) in Louisiana

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ABSTRACT

Symphyotrichum ericoides is reported for Louisiana, where it is known from a single calcareous prairie in the Morse Clay system. *Published online* ***www.phytologia.org*** *Phytologia 104(3): 24-26. (September 20, 2022). ISSN 030319430.*

KEY WORDS: *Symphyotrichum,* Asteraceae

In the course of ongoing research on Louisiana's grasslands, I located a small Morse Clay calcareous prairie, apparently not surveyed by previous explorers (MacRoberts et al. 2009). After consulting the landowners, I began my floristic survey of a 4 ha exposure of alkaline soils with a particular focus on one less-disturbed 0.5 ha opening. Within this smaller area I discovered *Symphyotrichum ericoides* (L.) G.L.Nesom in September 2021 (Figs.1 and 2). Hundreds to a few thousand plants were growing in the opening and a few individuals were found in a field on the adjacent property.

S. ericoides is native to prairies, glades, and disturbed openings in the northern and central United States and occurs sporadically in the Southeast (Brouillet et al. 2006, Weakley 2020). It has been deleted and excluded from the Louisiana flora by major sources (Gandhi and Thomas 1989, Kartesz 2014; SERNEC 2020; USDA 2014; Weakley 2020). I identified it by its small, bluish, falcate leaves which wither on the lower stem before flowering, strigose pubescence on leaves and stem, and phyllaries tipped with whitish spines.

The flora of this site will be discussed in a future publication, but particular associates might prove useful to surveyors. This prairie opening represents a drier than average phase of the Morse clay system which I have studied in Louisiana and Arkansas. It is marked by the presence of *Callirhoe papaver*, *Pyrrhopappus pauciflorus*, *Onosmodium bejariense*, *Asclepias viridiflora*, *Salvia azurea* and *Symphyotrichum oolentangiense* (pers. obs.). I have searched nearby sites with these species without locating additional *S. ericoides*. The species deserves tracking, with a suggested state rank of "S1 (critically imperiled)", but deeper review of herbarium specimens should be undertaken. The landowner is cooperative and will work to preserve the population.

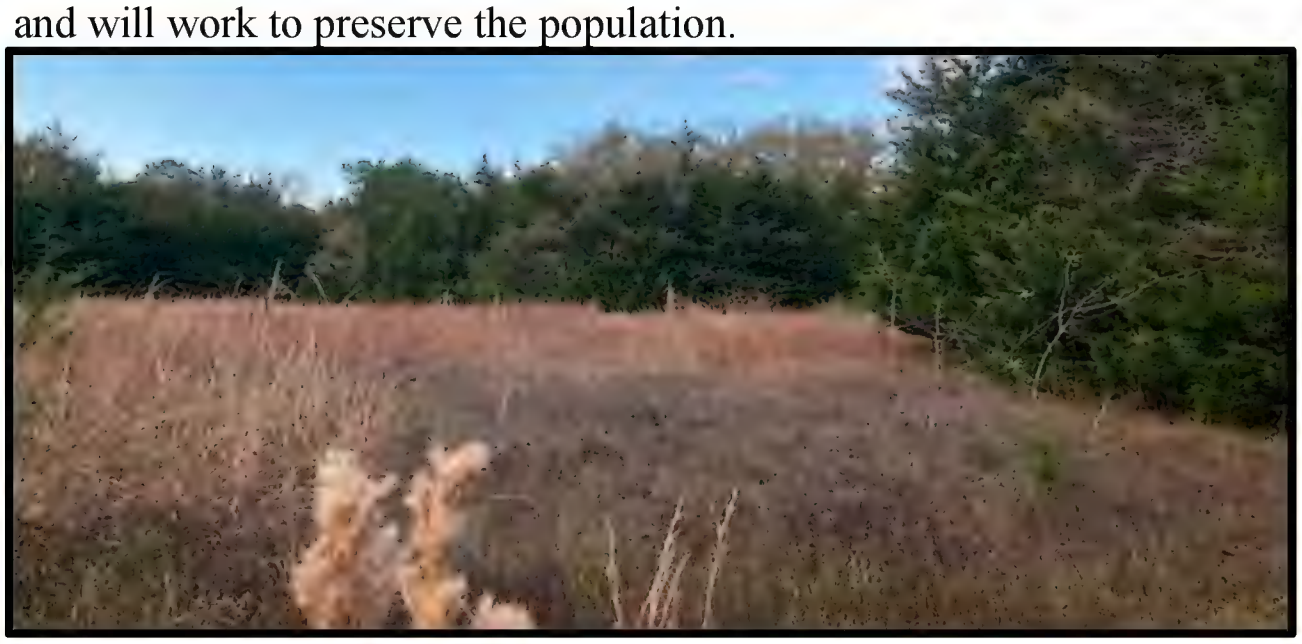

Figure 1. *S. ericoides* habitat in December 2021. Tall grasses include *Sorghastrum, Schizachyrium* and *Andropogon*. Dark area at lower right is dominated by *Iva* and *S. ericoides*.

Figure 2. *S. ericoides* plant from the Louisiana population with withered cauline leaves and close-ups illustrating pubescence on the leaves and spine-tipped phyllaries.

Voucher. **Louisiana. Bossier Parish**: Marbleseed Meadow, ~300 plants, colonial, East side of opening, with *Sorghastrum, Dichanthelium, Ruellia, Salvia, Iva*, etc., 32.40, -93.40, 7 Oct 2021, *Kelley s.n.* (LSU).

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I thank Lowell Urbatsch (LSU) and Chris Reid (LSU) for reviewing the paper and other field botanists with whom I discussed my initial, sterile identification.

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